

The League Against Voldemort

by Blaise

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Summary: Terrible news reaches Remus Lupin and the League is reformed. Can he clear Sirius Black's name? This is the sequel to 'Moony & Padfoot.'

1. Empty Chairs

> <meta name="ProgId"> The League Against Voldemort " Part I:
Empty Chairs

The League Against Voldemort " Part I: Empty Chairs

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_The League Against Voldemort, and more of Sirius and Remus. I hope you like it. The title 'Empty Chairs' comes from the song in Les Miserables " it seemed appropriate. _

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We open about a month after the events in 'Moony and Padfoot.'

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_Note: this was written before GoF was published, and so it contradicts many (though not, to my great delight, all) of the things we have learnt in reading it. _

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The nightmare still ringing through his mind, Remus sat bolt upright. For a second of blind terror, as dream and reality blurred, he heard the taps on the window again. But even when his head cleared, the taps continued. He could see nothing but the curtain twitching in the draught. Breathing rapidly, he went over and pulled the curtain aside.

There was an owl looking reproachfully through the glass, yellow eyes shining. Relief flooded through him, and he undid the catch and let the owl in. A blast of icy wind sent shivers all over his body. The owl dropped the letter on the floor and swooped off again with an irritated hoot. Remus picked it up and lit the lamp. By the flickering light, he could make out the familiar purple seal of Hogwarts, and he recognised the handwriting of the address. Still shivering, he broke open the seal, wondering why Dumbledore was sending him an owl in the middle of the night.

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Midnight, 6th January

_Dear Remus, _

--

I write in haste. Voldemort has made an appearance two hours ago, at Dover. He sank a Muggle ferry, and a witch has been killed. The League will be re-formed immediately. As a former member, I ask you to take up your position again. Please be at Hogwarts at dawn.

--

_Albus Dumbledore. _

Head of the League Against Voldemort.

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The letter fell from Remus' nerveless hand. He just made it to the bed before his trembling legs failed him. Voldemort, back. Back from whatever Harry had done to him. Back to fill the magical world with terror, to kill the brave and the good, to slake his terrible thirst for power with their life's blood.

He lay shaking, heedless of the wind whistling through the still-open window.

At last, he sat up, taking a shuddering breath, trying to calm himself. The League was re-forming. He remembered their last meeting, when they all had all known that there was a traitor within the ranks, and had watched each other with suspicious eyes. The League â€" Dumbledore's idea, of course â€" his network of spies and powerful wizards who were determined to destroy Voldemort. He had formed it the year Voldemort appeared, when Remus was still a student at Hogwarts, and when he and his friends had left school, Dumbledore had invited them to join. He had tried not to think about it before, for it only brought painful memories with it. But now there was no choice. If the League was coming together, if Dumbledore wanted him, he would go.

With hands that still shook a little, he dressed and pulled his warmest cloak around his shoulders. Then he went downstairs and found the second-hand broomstick he had bought. It was certainly no Firebolt, he thought ruefully as it juddered sideways and lurched into the air with a protesting groan.

As he flew through the bitter winter skies, he looked at the pinpricks of light below and shuddered to think of the fear that would be returning to them, fear that would make the worry caused by Sirius look like a child's game. The thought of Sirius nearly made him lose his grip on the broom. If Voldemort had come back, what would have happened to him? He realised that Pettigrew must have reached his master. And if Sirius had failed to prevent that, there was no telling what might have happened to him.

With a sick feeling in the pit of his stomach, Remus flew on. At last he could make out the towering bulk of Hogwarts. He was numb with cold. The broomstick gave a final jerk and deposited him in a heap on the ground outside the front steps. Shivering violently, he picked himself up and knocked on the castle doors.

'Oh, Remus!' Minerva McGonagall dragged the door back. 'How are you? Why haven't I heard from you sooner?' She gave him a rare smile, but he noticed that her eyes were dark-circled, and she looked as though she had not slept. 'You'd better go straight up. We're meeting in the office.'

Remus nodded mutely, and he began to make his way through the familiar passages to Dumbledore's office. The gargoyle at the foot of the stairs admitted him without question, and he climbed up.

'Remus! Wonderful, come in.' For someone who had just discovered that his worst enemy had returned, Professor Dumbledore looked remarkably cheerful. 'Almost everyone's here now. Go and take a seat.'

Remus went into the room where the League used to meet, and sat at his place at the round table. There were a number of gaps around the table, empty chairs that could not be filled. Against his will, his eyes were drawn to the pair of chairs where Lily and James had once sat, and the McKinnons' seats, and Francis Bone's, and Jenny and William Prewett's. He looked at Sirius' place, and at Peter's with a frown. Last of all his eyes fell on Andrea's chair, and he looked away hastily.

Snape was watching him with mistrustful eyes from his place on Dumbledore's left. Lady Irene de Beale, whom they said was descended from Rowena Ravenclaw herself, was reading an early edition of the Prophet and frowning. The entire front page was filled with the headline, in huge black print. You-Know-Who Returns. In the corner, Miranda Goshawk was knitting calmly. She was almost as old as Dumbledore himself, and a witch of great wisdom. Simon McKinnon, the only survivor from his family, kept an eye on Professor Dumbledore as he waited. Cornelius Fudge shifted uncomfortably in a seat in the other corner. He was not actually a member of the League, but he was present on this occasion because of the importance, Remus supposed.

Minerva came in, followed by Hagrid, and a third person whom Remus

did not know, a weather-beaten man with eyes set very deep in his skull.

'Wonderful, we're all here.' Dumbledore stood at the head of the table. He did not introduce the strange man, who took the seat between Remus and Minerva, James' old place.

'You all know why we're here,' Dumbledore began in a straightforward tone. 'There is no need for me to elaborate. And so, to business. We do not yet understand how Voldemort â€" ' there were a few flinches around the table as he spoke the name '- has managed to return. It is as shrouded in mystery as his thirteen-year disappearance. However, we will make finding this out our priority.'

Snape cleared his throat, and everyone looked at him.

'Headmaster, surely the cause of Lord Voldemort's return is clear to you. Without doubt, it has been with the help of his servant Sirius Black.' He shot a malicious look at Remus.

Dumbledore blinked, also looking at Remus, as Fudge rose to answer.

'Well, now, Professor, I am afraid that the Ministry of Magic has been unfortunate â€" _most_ unfortunate â€" in this sorry affair. I assure you all that we are doing our utmost to secure his recapture.'

Dumbledore nodded. 'Of course, we will look into all the possibilities,' he said. 'For more pressing matters. The security arrangements will have to be reinstated.' He nodded to Miranda Goshawk, who was taking the minutes. She sat bolt upright, dropped a stitch and cursed under her breath before scribbling something on the crumpled parchment on the table.

'I trust you all remember what roles you played before. You will resume them, with whatever alterations must be made.'

Dumbledore began to talk about the importance of keeping up their courage and not panicking. Remus stole a glance at the stranger. He was looking around the table warily, his keen eyes seeming to mark the other members' every movement.

'Okay, that's about everything. Remus, I'd like a word before you go.' Snape shot him another fierce look. The people around the table began to talk, in hushed voices as if they were at a funeral, as Dumbledore sat down and wrote a few things on some parchment.

Remus turned to the stranger. 'Are you new to the League?' he asked.

'In a manner of speaking. I have been working in conjunction with you over the years, but I have not attended a meeting since the very first one.' The man's voice was quiet, but Remus received the impression it could carry across a screaming crowd of Quidditch supporters should the occasion arise.

He nodded, and remembered his manners. 'Sorry. I'm Remus Lupin.' He extended a hand, which the stranger took in a strong grip.

'My name is Arion.'

Remus nodded, choosing not to ask whether that was his first or second name. 'What have you been doing for the League?'

Arion frowned. 'I'd prefer not to discuss it just now.'

The others were leaving. Hagrid clasped Arion's shoulder as he passed.

'I 'aven't seen you about much. Been off workin' for Dumbledore, eh?'

Arion smiled a little. 'As always. How are things?'

Hagrid shook his shaggy head. 'Such awfu' news. Why don' yeh come down an' have a cup o' tea with me, an' tell me where yeh've been all year?'

'That'd be great.' He rose and with a nod to Remus and to Dumbledore, he followed Hagrid from the office.

Remus looked back along the table. Snape was talking urgently to Dumbledore in his soft voice, and from his expression Remus could guess what it was about. Minerva was listening as well, seeming to agree.

'Severus, you know I will not take any unnecessary risks. I believe as you do that it is vital to find Sirius Black,' said Dumbledore, more loudly. Snape looked slightly disappointed, as if he had wanted to argue further. 'Now, will it be possible for you to continue with your previous work? I know it was unpleasant for you, but you do appreciate how very important it is. Are the arrangements still in place?'

'Yes, they are. I can go back to it, if I must,' said Snape, sounding less than delighted. 'At least I'll be able to get near Black.'

Dumbledore nodded vaguely. 'Good.' He looked at Remus. 'Why don't you come through to my room, and we'll have a little talk about what I'd like you to do.'

When they were in the privacy of the small round office, Dumbledore began, 'You know as well as I that Sirius is innocent. But you also know that without Pettigrew, or some other evidence, I have no way of convincing the League, or the Ministry. And so I would like you to look for Peter Pettigrew, and perhaps we can kill two birds with one stone.'

Before Remus could think of an answer, Dumbledore continued, 'I was hearing things about you, a few weeks ago.' His moustache twitched slightly. 'Both Snape and Fudge came to me with all sorts of stories. If Sirius is going to help you in this "as is, I suppose, appropriate" do _try_ and keep it from everyone else. I know he is innocent, but if anyone else catches you, you may not be so lucky. Of course, I will do my best to protect both of you from any further persecution, but I can promise nothing. Do you know where Sirius is?'

'He was at my house last month, and he's already looking for Peter. I haven't heard from him since then.' Remus sighed. 'I'm rather worried about him, to tell you the truth. He said he was going to Albania â€" after you sent us those files, you know â€" and if Pettigrew got past him â€" I don't know.'

'Well, I have heard nothing bad, so I suppose we must assume that he's lying low. Certainly the Ministry have lost his trail â€" though Severus told them about the Animagus. Clever of him, to find that out.' He smiled suddenly. 'But Sirius's outsmarted us again.'

'Is Voldemort still in England?' asked Remus worriedly. 'Where does he hide?'

'Ah, for that, I'll have to send you to ask Arion. He's my expert on this â€" if he doesn't know, you can be sure nobody knows.'

'Arion?'

'Yes indeed. He knows all the magical places on this island, he knows where Voldemort could and couldn't be. He's spent most of his life travelling across England, and he is a wizard of great power. You can trust him as you would me. I'll have a word with him, and send you an owl. Is there anything else?'

Remus shook his head. 'That's fine. I'll start looking for Sirius and Peter.' He rose to go.

'Oh, and Remus â€" do take care.'

With a wry smile, Remus left the little office.

He took his time going through the passages to the main door, remembering his old life here. A student shot out of a door, pulling his robes around him as he went, and nearly bowled Remus over. In his sternest professor voice, he said, 'No running in the corridors.'

The boy whirled around, and Remus' mouth fell open. So did the boy's.

'Professor Lupin? What are you doing here? Have you heard?'

Remus looked at Harry. Over the summer, he had shot up, and was now almost as tall as his father had been.

'Yes, Harry, I've heard,' he said sombrely.

Harry turned his green eyes to him. 'Is it â€" I mean, did Pettigrew help him?'

'I'm very much afraid that he did, but I don't know for certain.'

'Hermione says it said in the Daily Prophet that it was Sirius.' His tone was outraged. 'They're so stupid! I think we should tell them.'

Remus shook his head. 'That would probably only get me and Professor

Dumbledore, and you three, into serious trouble. We're going to keep looking for evidence. Sirius is hunting everywhere for Peter.' He did not mention his fears for Sirius' safety to the boy.

'Well â€¦ if you say so. Is Sirius all right? He hasn't written to me except for a birthday card, and I saw in the _Prophet_ in November that he was seen somewhere in Wales.'

'Sirius was fine a month ago â€" he was at my house.' A bell clanged, and Harry looked around.

'You'd better go, you don't want to miss breakfast.' The smell drifting through the castle reminded Remus of how hungry he was.

Harry nodded. 'Will you be around? Everybody really misses you here. The new teacher's nowhere near as nice as you, she's a bit boring.'

'I'll give you my address â€" have you got something to write on?' Harry handed him some parchment, and Remus scribbled a few words. 'Your owl will get it there. Off you go, now.'

He watched as Harry strode out of sight, and then went down to the doors. Outside, the air was still cold, and the grass was white with frost. Dark clouds were gathering in the west, and the wind was rising. Remus mounted his broomstick and rose into the stormy sky.

TO BE CONTINUEDâ€¦

_There are several more parts to this story, which will appear as soon as I've written them up. As always, I love to get reviews. Please? _

_ _

Blaise.

_27th January 2000. _

2. Mirror Image & The First Deadly Sin

> <meta name="ProgId"> The League Against Voldemort: Part II â€" Mirror Image

_The League Against Voldemort: Part II â€" Mirror Image _

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_You've got two for the price of one here, because I thought Part III was a bit small to go on its own. _

I hope you like it.

_ _

_Disclaimer: Just about everything here belongs to J K Rowling, etc.
As you may have noticed. _

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The flight back to his cottage was difficult, for there was a strong head-wind that made the broomstick vibrate dangerously and nearly blew him off course. When at last he arrived, Remus was cold and windblown. In the blessed warmth of his cottage, he collapsed into a chair and made himself some tea.

There was a strange crackling noise, like the sound of a badly tuned radio, and Remus looked up in surprise. The one old, dusty mirror in his house flickered and a dim figure appeared.

'Remus â€| can you hear me?'

Remus could scarcely make out the words, but had the voice been even more distorted he would have recognised it. 'I've been trying â€| for ages â€| terrible connection â€|'

'Sirius! What is it?' he asked, springing to his feet and staring into the mirror.

'You've heard â€| Voldemort â€| back?'

'Yes. Dumbledore's started up the League again.' He stood staring at the face in the mirror. Sirius was dishevelled again, the robes he wore were filthy and tattered.

'Wormtail â€| long hunt â€| got to him â€| but I â€| stop him â€|'
There was a tremendous crackle of interference, and Sirius' image blinked out. Remus waved his wand wildly at the mirror, and the image reappeared.

'Sorry â€| the line's â€|'

'Sirius, where are you?' asked Remus hastily as the image flickered.

'I'm in Dover â€| on the ferry that â€| but it's â€| ' Remus could only hear fragments of what Sirius was telling him through the static and the high-pitched whistles.

'Dover? Are you all right?'

'â€| did you say?' His voice was growing fainter. 'Voldemort â€| on the ferry â€| Wormtail â€| follow him to - ' The whistling grew to a painful pitch, and a crack ran across the surface of the mirror. As Remus raised his wand again, it shattered into a thousand fragments.

He swore. Ignoring the shards of glass all over the floor, he sank onto the sofa to think. At least Sirius was alive. Alive, and searching for Voldemort and Peter. It did not take him long to decide what he was going to do. Remus looked ruefully at his half-wild garden. It didn't seem that he would be spending much time on it over the next few weeks. He packed some things together after eating a

quick breakfast, and locked up the cottage again. But he did not get on the broomstick, for he'd had enough of being at the mercy of the four winds. Instead he flung some Floo Powder on the fire, and stepped in, shouting, 'Dover Station!'

He whirled around and around as bright lights flashed across his vision. Finally he staggered out of a hearth, and found himself surrounded by Ministry wizards.

'Who are you? What do you want?' demanded one. The world was still circling around Remus' head, and he put a dizzy hand on the mantle-piece.

'This area is restricted by the Act of Emergency that the Minister enforced this morning,' said a second, his wand pointing at Remus. 'Nobody is to enter or leave without special permission.'

As the world steadied, Remus looked up. 'I'm from the League Against Voldemort,' he said after a second. They all flinched at the name. 'Dumbledore has called it back together.' The wizards lowered their wands.

'Do you have any identification?'

Remus fumbled in his pockets. He had anticipated something of this sort, and he produced the letter Dumbledore had sent him. The wizard read it carefully.

'That seems in order. You may go.'

Remus left the wizards muttering amongst themselves, and went out onto the street. It was eerily quiet, and the few people about were walking quickly, heads down, wearing nervous expressions. It was a scene he recognised all too well.

In the Muggle area, there were more people about, but the only topic of conversation was the ferry disaster. He paused to buy a Muggle newspaper, and discovered that they were trying to explain that it had been caused by freak weather conditions and a navigational error. He tried not to look at the pathetic pictures of Voldemort's first victims. They only brought back a host of painful memories.

The docks were very crowded with Red Cross people, the Royal National Lifeboat Institution and would-be helpers with their little fishing boats. This must have been similar to how it would have looked at the time of Dunkirk, he thought, remembering his history lessons. Of course, the Muggles did not know that the dark wizard Grindelwald had played his role in that war as well.

He walked out along the pier and stared over the grey sea. At least he knew that Sirius was not there, that he was alive. He paced around the streets of Dover, hopelessly looking for Sirius. The witch he spoke to at the Ministry office had no idea where he might be, which both pleased and irritated him.

By nightfall, Remus had no more clue about where he would find Sirius. On impulse, he took the train back up to London, thinking that he could at least spend the night in the League's office in Diagon Alley for free. When he arrived, he met Miranda Goshawk capably in charge.

'Ah, Mr Lupin. And how are you?'

'I'm all right. Can I stay here tonight?'

'If you want. There's plenty of space. But before you make yourself comfortable, I need someone to run an errand for me.' She peered at him over her horn-rimmed spectacles.

'Anything I can do, of course,' Remus responded automatically.

Miranda Goshawk nodded approvingly. 'Nice to meet a well brought up young man these days. I need you to run over to the Ministry for me, and go down to their safes â€" you know, the ones where they keep anything high-risk. There are some papers I need.' She explained what she wanted, and Remus went down Diagon Alley to the very end, where the huge stone building of the Ministry stood.

He found everyone very busy there, but a junior porter showed him down.

'The safes, eh? Nobody ever goes down there much. I guess they must be pretty safe safes.' He laughed at his own joke, and Remus rolled his eyes. 'Anyway, 'ere you go. I've gotta go up to the desk again. It's awful busy, what with You-Know-Who come back again.' He shook his head. 'Don't know what the world is coming to, I really don't.'

When he had gone, Remus put in the code for the safe and spoke the spell that would open it. Miranda Goshawk had been right when she said they kept high-risk things there. He saw an entire shelf labelled 'Cursed Objects,' and another marked, 'Dangerous Books.' Miranda Goshawk's papers were on the bottom. As he flipped through them, he noticed the shelf above was marked, 'Wands of Prisoners.' He had always thought they were snapped.

At the same time as he found the papers, it struck him. He reached into the heaps of wands with a hand that was not quite steady. Finally he found the one he was looking for. Twelve inches, alder and dragon's heartstring. It was as familiar to him as his own, down to the chipped bit at the bottom. He glanced quickly over his shoulder, but remembered what the porter had said. 'Nobody ever goes down there much.' With a bit of luck, nobody would notice one wand was missing from the pile. He tucked Sirius' wand away in his robes, and closed the safe. He went back to the League house slowly, wondering how he was going to get it to Sirius. He took Miranda Goshawk her papers, and went to get some sleep.

Sleep was long in coming, as he worried about Sirius all through the evening. He could hear Miranda Goshawk pacing about the building, equally restless. Voldemort, returned. He shivered. And Sirius was pursuing him. When he finally drifted into an uneasy sleep, his dreams were full of the picture of a ruined house. But in the wreckage lay Sirius Black.

The next day as he made himself some breakfast in the little kitchen of the house, Miranda Goshawk came in. 'Have you heard?'

'Heard what?' Remus looked over his shoulder at her. He was starting

to get fed up of these startling announcements.

'You-Know-Who's struck again, in Brighton.'

'Brighton? What happened?'

Miranda Goshawk's normally stern face softened a little. 'He killed a whole family â€" the Patils. They have two girls at Hogwarts who are the only survivors.'

Remus had a mental image of the two bright girls he had taught last year, and he gasped. 'That's â€" that's terrible. I taught them last year. Oh, the poor thingsâ€|' He sat down heavily, nearly upsetting his cup of tea.

'They wouldn't join him, the paper says.'

Remus sighed. 'I had hoped â€" I had really hoped that these days were over. And now, it feels like those peaceful years were only a dream.'

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Three days later, Remus was at the Seven Groves. This was the wizarding university and academic centre, in Oxford. The Muggle university was nearby, and sometimes the wizarding students played silly pranks on the Muggles, getting into trouble with the Muggle Relations Office for their pains. He had been a student there himself, on Dumbledore's recommendation, and he still had access to Bodley's Library. He was sure there was a way of contacting someone, if you had their wand. It had been something his old Charms teacher had said, when he was at the Seven Groves, about personal magic. You could work certain kinds of charm on people if you had a hair of their head, or their wand. It wasn't widely known or used, which explained why the Ministry had never tried it, and you could only do certain things. They wouldn't be able to use Sirius' wand to ensnare him anyway, only to get into contact with him, and affect him in certain ways.

Now Remus was poring through the library, using the protective spells that were necessary when dealing with highly magical books. At last he found what he wanted. The book was called 'Glamours and Influences' and was extremely old. He turned the brittle pages carefully, and found the spell.

It was very intricate, and Remus had to read it several times before he fully understood how it worked. Nothing but the wand was required, but the words and the gestures were complex. It would allow the person he was thinking of to hear whatever he said, for about half a minute. That would be enough, Remus thought. He went into University Park, which was deserted because it was a cold, dank day, and found an isolated spot.

There he performed the spell. He could see it was working, for the wand was quivering on the ground.

'Sirius, this is Remus,' he began, hoping Sirius was not doing something difficult. 'I've found your wand. Right now I'm at the Seven Groves, but I think it would be better if you came to fetch it from me at my house in Llyn Alwyn, where you're less likely to be

seen. I'll be returning there tonight. Come as soon as you can. And good luck, Padfoot.'

The wand ceased to move, and Remus could feel that the spell was over.

Well, now he would go back home, and wait.

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Almost a week later, there came a knock on his door. Remus was feeling miserable, both out of worry for Sirius and because it was the full moon tomorrow. The knock startled him violently, and he went hurrying to answer it. Sirius stood on the doorstep.

'Moony, you're a marvel,' was the first thing he said. 'Do you really have my wand? How on earth did you get hold of it?'

Remus gave a warm smile. Sirius was looking almost as ragged as he had the last time he was at Remus' house, with torn clothes and the beginnings of a beard.

'Come in and sit down, and I'll tell you. How are you?'

'Not so bad. It was quite a shock, getting your message, I can tell you. Nearly jumped out of my skin. Lucky I was on my own.' He sat on the sofa beside Remus. 'Where is it?'

'Here.'

Sirius took it eagerly, and waved it in the air. A shower of golden sparks flickered around the room.

'Oh, I can't tell you how much I've missed this.' For a while he sat silently, getting used to the feel of it in his hand.

Remus began to explain how he had found it, and how he had worked the spell, and Sirius listened, still flashing the wand around the room.

'I knew you were brilliant, but this is amazing.' He shook his head in disbelief.

Remus smiled a little. 'Tell me about what you've been doing these two months.' A shadow passed over Sirius' face.

'Well, I followed Wormtail to Albania, and I nearly caught him when he met up with Voldemort. Then I followed them back up to France, and I was on the ferry that sank â€" ' Remus gave a strangled gasp '- I was all right, don't look like that. Anyhow, I tried to stop them, but â€" well, it didn't work.' His voice was sombre for a moment. 'So I kept looking here in England â€" you remember when I got in touch with you? Well, I couldn't stay in Dover and wait for you because of all those blasted Ministry people buzzing all over the place, so I kept looking for Wormtail, but he seems to have vanished. I think they have some kind of hideout somewhere, and I'm going to look for it.' His eyes darkened. 'I swore over James and Lily's grave that I would avenge them, and I'm not about to break that oath.'

Remus nodded mutely. Then he said, 'I'm hunting for him too;

Dumbledore's asked me to. But I can't go yet, because it's the full moon tomorrow. And I think it might be better if we went separately, because then we have twice as much chance of stumbling across him.'

'Yes, you're right. Though I'd rather go with you.'

'Me too.' They smiled at each other.

'Look, I'd love to stay a bit longer, but " well, someone saw me a few villages back. I got a bit lost, and I went and knocked on some Muggle's door.'

'You did _what_? Padfoot, sometimes I wonder if you ever think before you act.'

'Hey, I didn't go in. This old farmer shooed me away. I hope he thought I was some kind of tramp, but everyone knows what I look like around here, after last time. So I'd better get clear away before someone comes up here.'

'Yes, you certainly had. Well, now that you've got a wand you can Disapparate.'

'So I can.' Sirius had clearly all but forgotten what it was like to have a wand. 'You're so clever.'

'Take care of yourself, Padfoot.'

'You too. I'll be in touch. Tell me at once if you get anywhere near.'

'Of course I will.' Remus embraced him quickly, and Sirius Disapparated before he could say another word.

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****_Part III " The First Deadly Sin_****

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_i.e. Pride. _

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It was very reluctantly that Severus Snape had resumed his task for the League. He had kept his reputation intact throughout the thirteen years of Voldemort's absence, so there was no difficulty in his meeting with Lucius Malfoy, who had also returned to his old master. Still they did not suspect him, but he knew one slip would be enough. The memories he had of Voldemort's other victims still haunted his dreams sometimes.

But still he went to see Malfoy, at the assigned place and time. He could only be absent from Hogwarts on the weekends, of course, but he always had a plausible excuse for his disappearance. Only Dumbledore

knew the truth about where he went. The rumour in the Slytherin dormitories was that he had a girlfriend. This made Snape seethe with fury, but he did not scotch it, because it served a purpose. Nobody quite dared to ask him to his face, of course.

Thinking about it as he sat in the smoky Muggle pub where they were meeting, he gave a bitter smile.

'You'd do well to talk to Pettigrew,' said Malfoy, a slight sneer in his voice. 'He's another of you so-called Special Agents, or he used to be. And he knows about the project we'd like you to work on.'

'_Who?_' demanded Snape in a moment of blind incomprehension.

'Oh, of course, how silly of me to forget. The Old Fool's people think he's dead. I hear they made him a hero.' Malfoy laughed, calling Dumbledore by the name that all of Voldemort's supporters used. 'Peter Pettigrew. He was working for us all the time. He's high in favour with the Lord right now.'

'â€|ohâ€|' Snape was lost for words momentarily. His head was in a whirl of disbelief. Then he pulled himself together, knowing better than to show his response openly. 'Yes, yes, they believe he was working for them. That is interesting. Incredible that the Old Fool never realised.' There was a strange note to his voice, which Malfoy did not notice.

'Yes, they're still hunting for that Black character. Very helpful of them, fighting amongst themselves. His Lordship is most pleased.'

'Ah, then â€" then Black would be innocent?' asked Snape without thinking.

Malfoy snorted. 'From their point of view, certainly. However, _I_ would scarcely call him innocent, any more than the rest of that rabble. Anyway, this brings me to the point. His Lordship would be most delighted if you could somehow track down Black and capture him. We don't want him dead just yet â€" he knows a great deal about the Potter boy, which I'm sure we could â€" ah, extract â€" from him.'

Snape had recovered his presence of mind. 'Well, I'll see what I can do. Of course, the Old Fool's gang are trying to catch him as well, to put him back in Azkaban.' He used the disrespectful title for Dumbledore almost without thinking. He forced his appalled horror away, and continued in a reasonably calm voice. 'Now, I have several interesting things for youâ€|' he began, and told Malfoy the information Dumbledore had given him.

'Well done,' said Malfoy when he finished. 'You'll find Pettigrew in the inner room. He can tell you more about our plans for you.'

Snape thanked Malfoy, though the words stuck in his throat, and went to find the traitor.

~

But when he was alone, Snape's head was bursting with fury, with hatred and with humiliation. How could it be true? _How?_ It seemed that at every turn, James Potter and his friends were there, to mock him, to thwart him and destroy his achievements. He found his mind drawn back to that night last summer, when he had been humiliated before. Where his triumph had been snatched away by the Potter boy. It still made his blood boil to think of it. But this was worse, a thousand times worse.

Sirius Black was innocent. It could not be denied, could not be argued against. Heaven knows he had tried at first, tried to convince himself he was mistaken. But he had seen Pettigrew, heard his guilt from his own lips. There was no alternative.

And he had been wrong.

The shame of this, the humiliation like red-hot needles twisted in his soul.

Snape did not sleep that night. He did not even try. Instead he flung himself into his work, in a vain attempt to blot all thoughts of Sirius Black from his mind. But when the dawn finally broke murky and chill, he was no nearer an answer. The very idea of speaking, of proclaiming his own stupidity and his error to the world, burned in him and made him almost physically ill.

Perhaps it would be unsafe to let anyone know. It would put his cover at risk, he thought wildly, if he told people what he had learnt. Then there would be no reason to tell anyone of his humiliating mistake. He snatched at that thought, forced himself to believe it was true. That was what he would do.

In class, the students did not even dare to whisper to one another, 'What's wrong with Snape?' But they thought it, as detentions and extra work and scathing words were hurled at them. But this did not assuage his torment. He had made up his mind to keep silent, he told himself furiously, so why was he still haunted by Black's haggard face?

~

--

Sirius Black stalked across the moor, dog-form, sure that at last he was headed on the right track. It had taken several weeks of hunting and thinking for him to be certain. But now he had no doubt. The massive rocks loomed over the plain, red in the evening sun. Stonehenge, the oldest magical site in Britain, perhaps in the world. Nobody knew why the ancient wizards had built it, or how, but every first year student at Hogwarts knew that the magical fields were far stronger there than anywhere else. Even Muggles could sense it.

If Voldemort was hiding anywhere, it would be here. And Wormtail would not be far away. He was not so rash as to think that he would be able to fight Voldemort, but he knew that he was stronger by far than Peter. Now that he had his wand, it would be comparatively easy. Sirius gave a sigh of anticipation. For almost fourteen years, he had kept himself alive with the hope of this day.

He stood now in under one of the arches of the circle, looking alertly around him. Then he raised his head, catching a scent on the wind. A very familiar scent. His hackles rose. He moved back into the shade of the stones, hoping. Knowing he would be better off as a human for this, he transformed. He could still see a small shape moved through the grass towards the king-stone that lay flat in the centre. He pointed his wand.

Just before his spell was cast, the shape suddenly exploded upwards, growing and changing, and Sirius froze. Peter Pettigrew threw a nervous look over his shoulder and walked around the centre of the circle a few times. Sirius sprang out when he came near.

His wand pointed straight at Peter's heart. 'At last,' he spat. '_Traitor_. If you move, I'll kill you here and now.' Peter stood as if he'd been Petrified.

'Sirius â€" I â€" ' he stuttered.

'_Expelliarmus!_' Sirius shouted, but Peter muttered something and his wand remained in his hand. Sirius raised an eyebrow, and held his own wand ready.

'Learnt a thing or two from Voldemort, have you? Well, it doesn't matter.'

Peter did not answer, but a dark jet of flames shot from his wand. Sirius blocked the spell and dashed closer. He spoke a curse, and then another, and Peter stood quivering, trapped between the spells.

'Now, you'll be coming up to the Ministry to explain things,' he growled. Peter's eyes flickered away from Sirius' face for a second.

'Look behind you.' There was an oddly confident note in his voice. Sirius' lip curled, his eyes never leaving Peter's face, his wand poised.

'I'm not falling for that one, Wormtail, you must think I'm an idiot â€"'

'_Expelliarmus!_' As the word was barked out, Peter fell to the ground, a rat, and vanished into the long grass. Sirius spun around in horror. Twenty paces behind him was Arion, holding two wands pointed at him, one of which was his own.

'Don't move!'

He strode forwards. '_Locomotor Mortis!_' Sirius felt his legs bound together, and overbalanced.

From where he lay on the ground, he bellowed in fury, 'You blithering, bumbling idiot! I almost had him, I almost had caught him. For God's sake, Arion, didn't you recognise the other person there? It was Pettigrew, Arion, he's the traitor, not me. If you won't let me, than go after him yourself.'

Arion's face was impassive. 'I have no idea what you're talking

about. I certainly didn't recognise whoever you were talking to, but I assume he's another of the Dark Lord's servants. But the game is over, Black. You won't escape me the way you got away at Hogwarts.' He bound Sirius where he lay, and began to perform a spell that would take them to the Ministry of Magic.

TO BE CONTINUEDâ€¦|

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_I know you hate cliff-hangers, but the next bit is comingâ€¦| _

_And if anyone feels up to writing a review, my eternal gratitude will be your reward. _

_Blaise.__ _

_3rd February 2000 _

3. Crossroads

> <meta name="ProgId"> The League Against Voldemort: Part IV - Crossroads

The League Against Voldemort - Part IV: Crossroads

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Why should I save his hide?

Why should I right this wrong?

When I have come so far

And struggled for so long?

If I speak, I am condemned.

If I stay silent, I am damned!

From Les Miserables â€" 'Who Am I?' _

--

_Disclaimer: It all belongs to J K Rowling. _

--

It will be clearer if you've read 'The Whomping Willow' and 'Moony and Padfoot part 2.' As you have noticed, my stories interweave. Hope you like it!

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Professor Dumbledore was asleep in his office, snoring gently with his head resting on a pile of unread papers. A small, very speedy owl flew in the half-open window. It dropped a letter on his head. He stirred a little, but did not wake. The owl landed beside him, folding tired wings, and hooted. Professor Dumbledore opened his eyes.

'What is it?' he asked sleepily. Then he saw the owl. 'Where's the letter?' It pushed it towards him. 'Thank you.'

The owl flew from the room, and Dumbledore picked up the letter. It was yet another urgent memo from the Ministry of Magic. Scarcely worth waking him up for, he thought.

He opened it. It was short and to the point.

To: Professor A. Dumbledore

From: Cornelius Fudge, Minister of Magic

Re: Sirius Black

We have succeeded in recapturing Black. He is being held in the Diagon Alley office. Come immediately.

Dumbledore took a deep breath. Then he sprang to his feet, very alert. He rang a little bell, and put on his purple velvet cloak. In a moment, there were two other people at the door to the office, both rubbing sleep from their eyes.

'Minerva, Severus, I've got to go to the Ministry straight away,' he said. 'They've caught Sirius Black.' As he spoke, his mind was racing. There must be something he could do to prevent the inevitable.

'Thank heavens for that,' said Minerva.

A strange, unfathomable look crossed Severus' face. 'I take it he will be given the Kiss?' he asked slowly.

'Presumably,' said Dumbledore with a sigh. 'I have to go at once.' A thought struck him, and he snatched up a piece of parchment and scribbled a note. 'Minerva, send this off as soon as you can. Use the fastest owl in the tower.'

'Of course.' She looked at the address. _R. Lupin, Hill Cottage, Llyn Alwyn, Snowdonia, Wales_. 'What? Why are youâ€|?' she began, fixing him with her piercing eyes.

'Please, Minerva, trust me on this,' he interrupted. 'I may be some time. Keep everything running smoothly for me.'

They both nodded.

~

Dumbledore mounted his broomstick â€" a Silver Arrow, a vintage model â€" and soared into the night. At the same time, an owl was winging its way to the cottage where Remus lived. He was woken by its

repeated hooting outside the window, and he let it in, remembering the last time an owl had arrived in the middle of the night with a shudder.

This letter was written in the same swift, loopy handwriting, but the news struck him even harder than the former. _Sirius!_ He spoke his name aloud, wildly, desperately, his mind in a frenzy of grief and anger. He was caught, and it was all over. Sirius was captured.

Remus pulled himself together. This time, he could not afford to waste precious minutes in worry. After dragging on his robes with shaking hands, he took up his wand, and Disapparated.

~

Severus Snape was sitting in his room at the side of the Slytherin dungeons. The whole school had been roused by some wakeful student who had heard the news, and he could hear the Slytherins chattering and gossiping on the other side of the wall, but he did not feel able to face them. Not with their hundreds of questions about how Sirius Black had been caught, about his punishment.

If he closed his eyes, he could see the Dementors, standing around Sirius Black with their hoods lowered. He felt an incomprehensible mingling of emotions. Bitter, twisted pleasure filled him at the final punishment of his enemy, at the righting of the balance that had for so long been tipped against him. Now at last he would have his revenge, more than twenty years overdue.

But â€" but â€¦, _a small part of his mind was protesting weakly. _He didn't commit the crimes he's about to be punished for_. Well, what was that to him? Life wasn't fair. Besides, it was Sirius Black, Black who had tried to kill him, Black who had mocked him, never left him in peace. But still, the doubts hung around his head and would not go away. Could he let this happen, knowing the truth as he did?

_He was standing in the shadow of the Whomping Willow, looking at James Potter. James Potter, who had just risked his life to save him from a werewolf. To whom he owed his life. Who had not hesitated to rescue him. And, for a moment, he felt no hatred. _

Would they never be done with humiliating him? Even so long after his death, James could still make him feel worthless. He knew all too well the debt he owed him, a life-debt. James had not have hesitated to go there, to rescue his enemy from such a fate. And it would scarcely be his own life that hung in the balance this time. Only his accursed pride.

He paced around the room, staring from the window into the star-dusted night. Staring into the past, into the future.

~

Professor Dumbledore did not waste words on formalities when he reached the Ministry headquarters.

'Where is he?'

The junior civil servant in Reception knew at once whom he meant.

'He's being held in the Securitas Room, sir. The Minister is waiting for you in his office, however, and he said he'd like you to be shown up to him, if you don't mind, sir.'

'All right, then. I know the way. If a man called Remus Lupin arrives, show him up to wherever I am.'

'Very good, sir.'

He left the civil servant standing behind the desk, and half-ran up the stairs to Fudge's office. He went in without knocking.

'Oh, thank goodness you're here, Albus,' said Fudge breathlessly. 'Black was kicking up a huge fuss â€" telling us this drivel about how Mr Pettigrew was still alive and how you would vouch for him. We thought it would be better to wait for you to come before we let the Dementors have him. Besides, they're being brought over from Azkaban, and that'll take a while.'

Dumbledore nodded. 'I'll have to speak to Black.'

'Do you think that would be wise? I mean, after the last time -'

'It is necessary.' There was a note of finality in Dumbledore's voice.

'If you say soâ€|'

'Tell me how you came to catch him.'

'Well, it's quite a long story. It was entirely by chance, you know, though of course we're not intending to leak that. Our reputation has taken enough of a plummet without that getting out. In fact, it was one of your League men who did the catching.'

'Who?' asked Dumbledore curtly.

'Oh â€" what's he called â€" funny name â€| yes, Arion Something.'

'Arion,' echoed Dumbledore. 'Yes. That makes sense.'

'Anyhow, he says he was just getting near You-Know-Who's hiding place when he happened upon Black. Apparently Black was meeting with one of You-Know-Who's servants â€" unfortunately the other chap got away. Anyway, he put a Binding Spell on him, and dragged him up here. I think he's quite a powerful wizard, that Arion fellow. Naturally, I've put him forward for the Order of Merlin. He didn't seem to want it, but he most definitely deserves it.'

Dumbledore nodded. 'I shall go and see Sirius now, if you don't mind. You needn't come; I'm sure you have plenty of work. I will be quite safe.'

'Well, if you feel you mustâ€|,' said Fudge doubtfully. 'The

Dementors should be here shortly.'

Arion was sitting outside the Securitas Room. He held his wand in his hand, and he had the patient look in his eye of one who would be prepared to sit there all day. In his old-fashioned grey cloak and muddy boots, he looked oddly out of place in the tidy, carpeted corridors of the Ministry. He nodded a greeting to Dumbledore.

'I hear you did the deed,' said Dumbledore. 'How did it come about?' Arion began to explain, and Dumbledore listened with far more attention than he had given Fudge.

'and so I brought him straight here,' Arion concluded. 'I didn't catch the person he was meeting with, unfortunately, but he was almost certainly one of Voldemort's followers. Of course, Black carried on with his story that it was Pettigrew the whole way here.' He gave a dry laugh. 'But that's not surprising; you don't expect a cornered man to give up without a struggle.' His tone changed, becoming regretful. 'He used to be a fine man. We were friends once.'

Dumbledore nodded absently. 'I expect Remus will be here shortly. Let him in when he turns up.'

'If you say so.'

Dumbledore turned to go in.

'The door only opens from the outside,' said Arion. 'You'll have to let me know when you want to be let out.'

'Right.' Dumbledore pulled open the door, heavy both with bronze that resisted magical assaults and with a multitude of spells.

Black was standing by the barred window, looking at the starry sky.

'Dumbledore,' he gasped when he entered. 'Thank heavens.' The door swung shut again, clanging like a death-knell. 'Is there anything you can do? You know I'm innocent.'

Professor Dumbledore's face was very grave. 'Sirius, I have no proof. I can try to delay them, but it will take a miracle.'

Sirius looked away for a moment. Then, very softly, he said, 'I asked Remus to do something for me once - he's not here now, so - I'll ask you instead.'

Dumbledore met his sunken eyes, knowing the question before Sirius asked. 'No, Sirius. I can't do that.' He blinked furiously for a moment. 'You don't have any more evidence that will help?'

Sirius sat heavily on the stool that was the only piece of furniture in the room. 'No. I've been searching for Pettigrew - I was almost there - but then Arion met me. I tried - I tried to tell him, but he didn't listen.'

The door flew open, and a grey-faced Remus burst into the room. Sirius sprang up and embraced his friend.

'Oh, Sirius, what are we going to do?' He glanced hopefully at Dumbledore, so often the source of a solution to their problems.

Dumbledore shook his head heavily. 'I will try â€¦ but there is nothing I can promise. I will try to get them to change the sentence back to imprisonment, but there is very little hope. There is no way I can engineer another escape, not from here. Fudge already doubts my motives.'

'Damn Fudge!' Remus whirled around. 'You and I both know, Harry and his friends know, that Sirius is innocent. Will they not believe us?'

But Sirius answered that. 'Remus, there's no point hoping. Harry and his friends are students, Snape says I put a Confundus Charm on them and who's to gainsay him? You â€" you know why you won't be believed. And Dumbledore has no proof beyond his own word.' His voice was flat, hopeless, and he sank back onto the stool.

Remus sat on the floor beside him and leaned his head on Sirius' shoulder. His grey eyes were full of pain.

'Will you keep the promise you made?' asked Sirius, his voice barely audible.

Taking a shuddering breath, Remus said, 'Oh, Sirius â€¦. Yes. I may â€" be able to do nothing else â€" but I know â€" I understandâ€¦'

The door opened again. Arion looked in. 'Albus, the rest of the judicial committee are here. Fudge would like you to join them.'

'Just a moment.' Dumbledore looked at them. 'Sirius, I will try my best. Remus, if you want to stayâ€¦'

'I'll stay.' His voice caught in his throat. 'Will you warn us â€¦ when you reach a decision?'

'Yes.' Dumbledore blinked again. Then he went to Sirius. 'There is always hope, Sirius, as long as you live. Don't despair too soon.' He looked at Remus. 'You too.'

Sirius mustered himself and smiled faintly at Dumbledore. 'Thank you.' For a moment, Dumbledore clasped his hand without speaking, and then went from the room.

~

'No, Professor Dumbledore, although your story is interesting, I fear it cannot be supported.' Fudge's tone was respectful, but firm, and the other elderly wizards and witches around the table nodded agreement. 'The evidence is powerfully against you. Nor can the sentence be changed. Please bear in mind that it was undoubtedly with the â€" uh, the suspect's assistance that He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named has recovered. And so, although I don't like to go against you, I fear we will have to carry on as before.'

'Exactly,' said Macnair, who had arrived with the Dementors. 'This

whole idea is foolish. I don't know why we even wasted the time having this little " chat.'

Fudge turned disapproving eyes to him. 'I would not like it to be said that the Ministry condemns people " whatever their crimes " without at least listening. But we will not change either the charge or the sentence, Albus.'

'In that case, I would like to register my objection.'

'It has been registered,' said the secretary taking minutes automatically.

'And I would like to tender my resignation from this committee.' Fudge sucked in his breath.

'Oh, come now, Albus, isn't that a bit much? After all, it's not exactly a crucial matter.'

Professor Dumbledore's face was angry. He stood up. Every eye in the room was upon him. 'Not exactly a crucial matter?' he echoed. 'I don't know what the rest of you think, but I would imagine that such a miscarriage of justice is indeed a crucial matter.' He glared at the elderly wizards sitting uneasily around the table. The Daily Prophet news correspondent who had been representing the press at this conference was watching raptly, scribbling shorthand notes with a charmed quill.

'Well " Albus, you must consider " I mean, we need your advice " ' Fudge stammered.

Dumbledore considered how much easier things would be if he had accepted the post of Minister when they had offered it so long ago. 'It scarcely seems so.'

Fudge turned hopelessly back to the rest of the committee. 'Well, why don't we take a final vote?' he said, sounding as if he were single-handedly trying to restore sanity to the world. 'All those who support the original proposition raise their wand hand.'

The count was twelve for, and one against. 'I'm sorry, Albus, you're outvoted.'

Dumbledore said nothing.

'The Kiss will go ahead.'

He rose from the table, followed by Macnair. Dumbledore swept from the room before them.

Arion was still standing guard by the door of the Securitas Room. 'Are they both still there?' Dumbledore asked at once.

'Of course.'

'The Dementors should up be here soon.'

Arion nodded. 'I'll let you and Lupin out when they arrive, shall I?'

'Please.' Privately, Dumbledore suspected that Remus would not be leaving any more than Sirius would, but he did not say so. He would try to prevent that, at least.

Two pairs of eyes turned to him as soon as he entered.

'I'm sorry. I tried everything I could.' Dumbledore had rarely felt so utterly useless; not since the deaths of the Potters had he felt this dull pain.

Sirius looked at Remus. 'It looks like it's over, then.' His voice was almost controlled. Remus' face was white, with odd red blotches as though he was about to cry, but he did not. 'Remus, I know " what you're thinking. But you have to stay alive, you have to live, for Harry's sake.'

'Sirius " you know " you've always been such a good friend to me' He grasped his hands suddenly. 'I won't fail you now.'

Dumbledore stood away, knowing that his interference would not be wanted. The door swung slowly open, and the room became dark and cold. A towering figure stood on the threshold, dwarfing the two men beside it.

'Dumbledore, Lupin, you'd better come out now,' called Arion, still calm. Remus flung his arms around Sirius, holding him close, and then raised his wand. He pointed it directly at Sirius' heart. His hand was shaking.

'Go on,' said Sirius steadily. 'It's better this way.'

The Dementor stepped forward, and slowly lowered its hood. Remus glanced for a second at it, and drew a long, shuddering breath.

'I'm sorry,' he gasped in a broken voice. Sirius was looking at him imploringly as the Dementor came nearer.

'Lupin, what do you think you're doing?' snapped Fudge. 'Get out of there!'

'Please, Remus' Sirius stretched out his hands to him. Remus tried to steady his shaking wand.

And then there were running footsteps in the corridor, and a new voice. 'Is this where " where Black is being held?'

'What on earth' Fudge spun around. Recognising the voice, Dumbledore caught his breath and dragged Remus' arm down. The Dementor paused as Dumbledore pointed his wand at it.

'Wait!'

'Listen to me, all of you!' Severus Snape pushed past the Dementor, past Arion and Fudge and Macnair, who were too stunned to stop him. He looked at Sirius and Remus for a long time as they stood frozen.

'He's innocent,' he said at last.

Fudge and Arion gasped, and Macnair turned purple with anger. Dumbledore was watching Severus with pleased eyes. And Remus and Sirius could only stare open-mouthed.

'How â€" how the hell do you know?' demanded Fudge roughly.

'You all know what I do for the League,' said Severus. His voice was twanging with tension. 'I have spoken with â€" with the traitor Peter Pettigrew, very recently. And with Voldemort.' Fudge swallowed hard at the sound of the name, and Macnair flinched. 'Black â€" Sirius Black â€" did not kill Pettigrew, nor does he work for Voldemort.'

'But â€" but you said â€" last summer â€" you said he was guilty then â€" you were our primary witness â€'|' Fudge was gaping slack-jawed at him as though he had suddenly grown another head.

Severus' eyes were very black. 'I â€" did not have the evidence I do now.' They weren't going to make this easy for him. And with the Dementor towering in the background, his head was full of the darkest of thoughts. As if he could read his mind, Dumbledore stepped forwards.

'I suggest, Fudge, that you send the Dementor away and we will continue this discussion more amicably.'

'Right, of course, yes,' said Fudge, stunned, and barked an order at Macnair. As soon as the Dementor glided away, with Macnair forcing it at wand-point, the room felt warmer, and the lights came back on. Outside, the sky was turning from black to navy above the lights of London. Sirius and Remus were still staring at Severus, who was looking into the distance unseeingly. Dumbledore smiled.

'Well, Severus, I have to say I'm impressed with you.'

Severus bristled. 'What's that supposed to mean?'

'Nothing, nothing,' Dumbledore replied quietly. 'Carry on.'

Severus looked around at his audience. 'It's quite simple. Sirius Black is innocent. I have the proof of my own eyes, and I imagine that Professor Dumbledore will tell you the same story.' The words stabbed him even as he spoke, but he carried on. 'Peter Pettigrew is alive, and working for Voldemort.' He looked furiously at Fudge's blank expression. 'Are you a complete idiot? It's true, I tell you. You â€" you have no ideaâ€'|' He turned away.

Professor Dumbledore stepped forwards again.

'Well, now, Cornelius, I think you will have to reconsider your decision in the light of Severus' evidence,' he said, unable to keep all the triumph from his tone. Fudge nodded dumbly.

Remus and Sirius were still standing close. Thoughts were whirling through Remus' head incoherently. Snape â€" _Snape,_ who hated him, had saved Sirius. He was too stunned to speak. Then, silently, Sirius extended his hand to Severus. Severus stood there, motionless, and then he took Sirius' hand. If he was going to do this, he was going to do it properly. For a moment the hatred flickered again in his

eyes, more violent than ever before, but then it faded. He let his hand fall, and paced to the solitary window.

Remus turned to Sirius then, and embraced him. He felt he would float away on joy.

'You're free,' he murmured. Sirius looked dazedly at him.

'Yes,' he said, as though he were just waking up. 'Yes, I am.' His look of incredulity made Remus burst out laughing. The sound echoed around the room like trumpets. Dumbledore crossed over to them and smiled benignly.

'Excellent,' he said warmly. 'Quite excellent.' He looked at Severus, who was still staring into the sky, and his smile deepened with pride.

The thought of all the explanations that would have to follow made Severus feel ill. How many times would he have to repeat that he had been wrong, explain his stupidity? He felt terrible, but at the same time oddly lightened.

_Are you happy now, James? Will you leave me in peace? I have repaid my debt. _

THE END

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_Okay, eleventh-hour rescues are a bit corny, but I had to do it. Of course, you knew it was coming. For a moment, I considered allowing Remus to kill Sirius, and then for Snape to enter, but that seemed a bit cruel, and I couldn't keep the angst going forever. Besides, Remus would have tried to commit suicide, unless Dumbledore stopped him. And Harry would have come at me in the night with his wand raised in fury if I had let those two die. And then you would never find out how 'The Farther Shore' ends, and what a shame that would be! _

--

_Is there anything you want to say? Please? Just to tell me you liked/hated it? Writing it was an incredible experience. I had a fit of the scribbles one evening, and worked solidly for hours. _

--

Blaise.

7th February 2000

End
file.